



Air Force Birthday Address, Canberra
Acting Chief of Air Force: Air Vice-Marshal Leo Davies
Wednesday 27 March 2013

(Check against delivery)

Ladies and Gentlemen:

On behalf of the Chief of the Air Force, I would like to welcome you all here today to ANZAC Parade and the Air Force Memorial to mark the 92nd anniversary of the formation of the Royal Australian Air Force. On the 31st of March 1921 our Air Force became the third arm of Australia's Defence Force and the second air force in the world.

I would like to extend my particular appreciation for the currently serving members who have taken time out from their duties to be here today. Gathering together on occasions such as this plays an important part in sustaining and evolving an organisation's cultural identity. Commemorating an anniversary provides us an opportunity to pause during our busy lives to reflect on our history, on where we are at present, and on our plans for the future.

Today's commemoration is also our opportunity to remember the service and sacrifice of the men and women of the Air Force who have served before us—the nearly 320 000 Australians who have worn the Air Force uniform in peacetime and in war.

This ceremony is also an appropriate time to remember those comrades who are no longer with us. Those who laid down their lives in the performance of their duty—not just in war, but those who died as a result of their service in peacetime, in accidents and as a result of the inevitable march of time. Today we pause to give thanks for their service and remember them and their families.

It is, I think, an ingrained cultural habit within nearly all societies to mark significant anniversaries. Probably the two most common would be our birthdays and our weddings. Yet there are many other occasions we may seek to remember each year, the birth of our children, the purchase of our first home, some calamitous disaster, or the death of a loved one. Such significant experiences and events, both the good and the bad, are remembered each year as milestones marking our journeys to the present day.

As a large and dispersed organisation, it is difficult for the Air Force to mark specifically all the key events that have formed our history over the last 92 years. It therefore makes events like today so much more important, and a more complex event than just the birthday of the RAAF. It is the one day of the year we use to remember all the milestones that mark our collective history—both the good and the bad.

If I was to ask the men and women of today's Air Force what was the significance of 31 March, most, if not all, would indicate that the day was our birthday. If I was to ask what event they would reflect most on in commemorating our history since formation in 1921, then the response would be far more diverse in nature, with each person focused upon their own experiences. However, looking beyond the individual memory – each Airman's response is a reflection of our common and shared heritage – a heritage which binds us together as a fighting force.

If we were attending the RAAF birthday events of a Bomber Command Association branch for example, they may well be remembering the devastating loss of 95 aircraft and crews and the wounding of many more during the Nuremberg raid of 30 March 1944. This raid was the most costly Bomber Command operation of the Second World War, and included many Australians. Perhaps, if the past members of No 3 Aircraft Depot are gathered together, they might be reflecting on the pain and suffering that grew out of the deseal/reseal program. While members from our airlift squadrons and expeditionary support wings may well be remembering with pride the vital work they did in bringing relief to East Timor in 1999.

History tells us, that from our humble beginnings in 1921, the RAAF has grown into the mature air force we are today. Along the way we have gone to war, enforced peace on those who would spread destruction, and kept the peace for those who did not have the ability to maintain it for themselves. We have flown out from our bases to pluck the lost from danger and devastation, and we have delivered aid to those in need, all the while contributing directly to our nation's security. We have changed from fabric covered bi-planes to fifth generation fighters; from a handful of male only, largely Anglo-Saxon personnel to a multicultural organisation in which men and women are welcomed and encouraged to serve with pride and distinction.

From the pride of our successes and the joys of comradeship, to the desolation of the hard times and the grief in losing friends and loved ones, we all have milestones to commemorate and to remember today. I would like to express my great appreciation to each and every one of you for joining with me in this special occasion in commemorating the 92nd anniversary of the Royal Australian Air Force.

Thank you.